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SUBJECT: FRANCE AND WEST AFRICA

REF: A. 04 PARIS 9167

[1](#)B. 04 PARIS 9146

[1](#)C. 04 PARIS 9145

[1](#)D. 04 PARIS 9133

[1](#)E. 04 PARIS 9130

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: This is the last of a series of messages (reftels) briefly summarizing French relations with African nations. For the last two years, France's Africa policy has, of necessity, been focused on the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. Two years after France hosted the Linas-Marcoussis and Kleber Center meetings designed to resolve the crisis, France is pessimistic and unable to exert direct political influence on the Ivoirian actors. Relations with neighboring states have been influenced by the Ivoirian crisis, with the French seeking to establish better relations with Guinea, knowing that a crisis there would seriously strain their diplomatic and military resources. In Burkina Faso, France has urged the GoBF not to interfere in Cote d'Ivoire. In Ghana and Nigeria, France seeks to engage Presidents Kufuour and Obasanjo in the search for an end to the crisis. President Chirac's upcoming trip to Senegal, however, is likely to focus on the bilateral relationship. END SUMMARY.

COTE D'IVOIRE

[1](#)2. (C) Two years after the signature of the Linas-Marcoussis accords, Cote d'Ivoire continues to consume the time of French Africa policy makers, but France's ability to influence events politically has substantially declined. Among the reasons for the loss of French influence are:

- Apparent mutual distrust, even dislike, between Presidents Chirac and Gbagbo;
- The departure from the MFA of Dominique de Villepin who, although having very poor relations with Gbagbo and his circle, was inclined to engage on African issues to an extent his successor, Michel Barnier is not;
- The November 2004 bombing of a French military position at Bouake and the subsequent killing by French forces of Ivoirian demonstrators in Abidjan.

[1](#)3. (C) Unable to exert significant influence on the parties directly, the French are now obliged to work through the AU and the UNSC to try to move the process towards the goal of elections which the French hope will produce a President with an uncontested mandate. We anticipate that, in addition to supporting South African President Mbeki's AU-mandated mediation efforts, France will seek to strengthen the mandate and increase the force level for UNOCI, placing an increasing burden on the UN to achieve the objective of credible elections. Meanwhile, the 4,462 French troops currently deployed in "Operation Licorne" are criticized by both Gbagbo's circle and the opposition for favoring each other, and they and civilian French nationals remaining in Cote d'Ivoire are potential targets for the Young Patriots or other street gangs. The MFA currently estimates that there are 7,000 French citizens in Cote d'Ivoire, 6,000 of whom have both Ivoirian and French nationality.

[1](#)4. (C) In this environment, there is occasional media speculation that France might be tempted to rid itself of the turbulent Gbagbo by any means available. Our interlocutors tell us that the days when France could remove a head of state are in the past, and our judgment is that France would not risk an operation to remove Gbagbo. The more pressing question, in our view, is whether France will maintain its military presence as a back up to UNOCI until elections take place. For now, we are told that Licorne will remain deployed at current levels until the elections. However, that could change should the crisis deteriorate further to an extent that elections become impossible, or if (and here we defer to Embassy Abidjan on the possibility) Gbagbo were to demand that Licorne be withdrawn. Clearly, the consequences for the remaining French nationals of a withdrawal of French forces would be serious. The same is true for France's credibility throughout Africa. Such a decision will not be taken lightly, but with the French media and some parliamentarians increasingly questioning the utility of France's (costly) military presence, we believe that the possibility that Chirac might decide to bring the troops home

cannot be discounted.

GUINEA, SIERRA LEONE, AND LIBERIA

15. (C) France experienced decades of difficult relations with Guinea, dating back to Sekou Toure's 1958 rejection of a proposed "Communaute Francaise," leading to a French embargo. Relations hardly improved after Toure's death in 1984 and Lansana Conte's accession to power. However, in 2004, Michel de Bonnecorse, President Chirac's advisor on African affairs met with Conte in an effort to turn the page. MFA officials tell us that with crises elsewhere in the region, France cannot sustain a Guinea policy based on waiting for the ailing Conte to die. They have been impressed by the caliber of Guinean ministers and France is seeking to assist Guinea in its dealings with the IFIs.

16. (C) Almost all of our dialogue with the GoF on Sierra Leone has been in connection with our unsuccessful efforts to solicit a French contribution for the running of the Sierra Leone Special Court. France has no particular interests in Sierra Leone beyond seeking a regional solution to the crises in the Mano River Union states which would address the capacity of armed groups to cross borders freely.

17. (C) Liberia has almost dropped off the French agenda since July 2002, when Michel Dupuch retired as Chirac's African affairs advisor. Dupuch, who was French Ambassador in Cote d'Ivoire for fourteen years, was reportedly close to Charles Taylor and was undoubtedly behind accusations made by the presidency in the spring of 2002 (not coordinated with the MFA) about USG support for the LURD. Press reports also linked Dupuch with the activities of French companies in Liberia's timber industry. As with Sierra Leone, France's political interest in Liberia is entirely based on its need to find a solution for its problems in Cote d'Ivoire.

BURKINA FASO, MALI, AND NIGER

18. (C) Following the onset of the current crisis in Cote d'Ivoire in September 2002, French officials told us privately that they had no doubt that the GoBF was supporting the rebels (now New Forces). They told us that the reason France would not make this public was not because it would require France to defend Cote d'Ivoire in accordance with a bilateral defense treaty, but because to do so would subject the Burkinabe population in Cote d'Ivoire to reprisals. The MFA assures us that Chirac and Villepin told President Compaore to cease his support for those seeking to overthrow Gbagbo. However, they view Compaore's role in Cote d'Ivoire as a step back in his efforts to rehabilitate himself after years of arms transfers through Burkina Faso from Libya, destined for Charles Taylor's Liberia.

19. (C) President Chirac visited Mali and Niger in October 2003, where he was portrayed as a champion of the developing world and feted by those who approved of France's opposition to military operations in Iraq. The visit, like France's relations with Mali and Niger generally, was focused on economic and developmental issues such as cotton prices and potable water.

GHANA, TOGO, BENIN, AND NIGERIA

10. (C) Ghanaian President Kufuor is one of the few anglophone African heads of state (with Obasanjo and Mbeki) who receives regular high-level French attention. His role when ECOWAS chair and his engagement on Cote d'Ivoire are obvious reasons, but we sense that the French genuinely admire Kufuor. France's relationship with Togo is perhaps better described as Chirac's relationship with Gnassingbe Eyadema. In this relationship, we see the MFA as impotent in view of the decades-long friendship between the two presidents. Eyadema's revisions of the Togolese constitution, rigging of elections, and human rights abuses are all glossed over as France seeks to persuade its European partners to resume assistance to Togo. France's relations with Benin are uncontroversial and largely focused on cooperation issues, most recently the holding of the latest French military training program in Benin in 2004.

11. (C) French interests in Nigeria are principally economic. Chirac's political exchanges with President Obasanjo are focused on Cote d'Ivoire or whatever other crisis is current in Africa. France is anxious to see Nigeria comply with the ICJ ruling on the Bakassi peninsula but avoids engaging Nigeria directly in order not to be seen as partisan in favor of Cameroon.

MAURITANIA, SENEGAL, GAMBIA, GUINEA-BISSAU, AND CAPE VERDE

12. (C) France's relations with Mauritania have improved since the 1999 "Ould Dah" affair, concerning the arrest of a Mauritanian soldier which led to Nouakchott demanding the suspension of French military cooperation. After the French and Mauritanian Foreign Ministers met in Paris in April 2001

and in Nouakchott in June 2001, the MFA described relations as "warming." Following the June 8, 2003 coup attempt, FM de Villepin visited Nouakchott on June 17 to express French solidarity with President Taya and to declare relations as "excellent." After another coup attempt, which forced Taya to cancel his participation in the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of allied landings in France, the MFA stated that change should be achieved through the ballot box, and not by force.

13. (C) While the Presidency, at Taya's request, agreed in 2003 to treat Mauritania as a Maghreb state, French relations with Mauritania continue to be handled at the MFA by the Africa directorate. However, MFA activity in recent years has been essentially limited to reacting to the coup attempts and Mauritanian accusations of Burkinabe interference. A senior MFA official, in September 2004 told us that the Mauritanian claims were hard to believe, ascribing the accusations to internal Mauritanian politics.

14. (C) Senegal remains important for France, not only politically and economically, but also because France maintains approximately 1100 troops in Senegal. France has also provided transportation and other support for Senegalese forces participating in the MONUC mission in the DRC. French officials have repeatedly insisted to us that Senegalese President Wade's close ties to the United States are welcomed in Paris as a sign of Senegal's political maturity. They acknowledge, however, that Wade feels that France is punishing him for his tilt to the U.S. The French see Wade as mildly paranoid in this regard, and MFA officials have often expressed their frustrations with Wade for his frequent absences from Senegal and his tendency to raise a multitude of arcane topics with President Chirac during his visits to France. MFA officials have also expressed concern to us about Wade's "authoritarian" tendencies, particularly following the expulsion of a RFI journalist and the beating of an opposition figure in October 2003.

15. (C) After Wade reportedly complained about Chirac's decision to visit Mali and Niger without stopping in Dakar in November 2003, Chirac promised to visit Senegal, a trip which will occur next week. During his two-day visit, Chirac will undoubtedly reiterate French praise for the conclusion of the peace accord signed between the GoS and the Casamance rebel group, the MFDC, on December 30, 2004 as part of his effort to assure Wade that France remains Senegal's most reliable partner. While Cote d'Ivoire will be on the agenda, it is unlikely that Chirac will ask Wade to re-engage. The French are currently supporting the mediation efforts of South African President Mbeki and, in any event, see Wade as being too prone to irritate his regional peers.

16. (C) The lack of French attention to Gambia is perhaps demonstrated by the MFA website's reference to President Jammeh's 1998 visit to Paris as an indication of French support for the democratic process in the Gambia. France maintains a modest assistance program, but no discernible political interest.

17. (C) The French Embassy in Bissau was destroyed in May 1999 by soldiers loyal to Ansumane Mane, causing France to withdraw its diplomats and end assistance programs. With the return of civilian administration, France resumed assistance. However, the MFA viewed President Kumba Yala's management of the country as "erratic" and expressed no surprise or condemnation of the mutiny which ended his rule in September 2003.

18. (C) France's relations with Cape Verde are negligible. France's junior minister for cooperation visited Praia in 1997 and Prime Minister Neves visited Paris in November 2003 when he was received only at the level of the cooperation minister.

19. (U) Abidjan minimize considered.
Leach